

Transition for Incarcerated Students

Teaching Transition and Job Skills in Prison

Class Objectives

- ✦ Skills for finding jobs and keeping jobs
- ✦ Establishing and achieving goals
- ✦ Adult skills such as money management and self advocacy
- ✦ Tools for staying out of prison

Who Am I and What do I do?

- ✦ Sarah Hunt, special ed teacher at ASPC-Tucson
- ✦ We teach Adult Basic Ed and GED courses
- ✦ We have approximately 100 special ed students, about 25-30 minors and 60-70 adults
- ✦ Students cover most disability categories and range widely in skills and knowledge

Who Are the Students in this Class?

- ✦ Post-GED. Students who have received their GEDs may choose to stay in special ed. If so, they take this course.
- ✦ One exception to the post-GED rule is that I have used this course with MIMR students who will be released soon and need these skills
- ✦ ASPC-Tucson has both minors and adults but all of my students are 18-22.

Why do Students Take this Course?

- ✦ Some have specific goals such as writing a resume or learning how to interview
- ✦ Some are close to their release date and want help/information about how to adapt to the "outs"
- ✦ Some don't want to sign out of special ed because they feel they may need it in the future or they want something constructive to do
- ✦ Some worry about fitting in in the world outside of prison and want to spend time with, converse with someone who is not an inmate or a correctional officer

What do They Need?

- ✦ Their needs range from needing specific skills to needing everything from budgeting to social skills to basic computer skills
- ✦ Some students have had similar classes before
- ✦ Some have had jobs before
- ✦ Some have had their own apartments and bank accounts. Many have had their own money but never learned budgeting skills
- ✦ Some know what type of job they would like, others have no idea
- ✦ Some would like to have a career, some want to find a job until they finish their parole

Curriculum

- ✦ Varies according to student need and student goals
- ✦ What we cover often decided by consensus
- ✦ Students choose from money management, career exploration, interviewing, and resume preparation

Where Do We Start?

- ✦ Transition Surveys:
- ✦ Required for IEPs anyway
- ✦ There are different types for different needs
- ✦ Very helpful to teachers for course planning and writing career goals
- ✦ Sometimes helpful to students for understanding where they are and where they want to go

What Are Job Surveys and What Do They Do?

- ✦ Multiple choice forms
- ✦ They can focus on job types, transferable skills, attitudes, and barriers
- ✦ Some specialize in ex-offender re-entry
- ✦ Quite useful for course planning, writing IEPs, and needs assessment

What if they have no idea what they want?

- ✦ *Career & Life Explorer*: groups interests into personality types and ability levels
- ✦ *Transferable Skills Scale*: Lets students see what they already know and how that can translate into a career
- ✦ *Transition to Work Inventory*: Groups interests into career fields

Planning

- ✦ *Career Planning Scale*: Gives teacher and students an idea of how much the student knows about his career choice and how to achieve it.
- ✦ *Job Search Attitude Inventory*: Good for students who are close to release and may need specific help in job hunting.

Attitude/Behavior Surveys

- ✦ *Offender Reintegration Scale*: Very helpful for students who are close to release and need to see what they need help with. It looks at family, finances, worries, and resources.
- ✦ *Barriers to Employment Success Inventory*: Good for ED students. This survey helps students see how their behaviors affect their career success.

Materials and Activities

- ✦ All materials are textbooks, workbooks, DVDs, or news articles
- ✦ All activities are paper and pencil activities
 - no Internet in prison
- ✦ Classes are discussion and role playing (particularly for job interviews)
- ✦ Class size ranges from 1 to 5 depending on how many eligible students I have on a unit.

For Career Exploration

- ✦ *Getting the Job You Really Want* has some very useful activities for goal setting and self exploration. I particularly like "An Inheritance from Uncle Harry" in which students have to imagine inheriting money but spending it on someone/something else. This is very difficult for my students.

Career Exploration, Cont.

- ✦ *Your Life and Career Plan Portfolio*: This book is really designed to help students put together a career portfolio. My students don't have enough materials to actually make a career portfolio but I find this book useful as a self discovery tool. It looks at values, learning styles, and self management skills.

More Career Exploration

- ✦ *Your Promising Future* begins by helping students define what work is and what success is. The author also addresses barriers (both real and imagined) and how important hard work is

Last Career Exploration

- ✦ *Developing Career and Living Skills*: Primarily developed for high school transition courses but useful for my students too. This book has chapters on mapping career plans, self discovery, and problem solving skills. One thing I like about it is that it has vocabulary words at the end of each chapter.

Quick Side Note

- ✦ Many of my students lack vocabulary and conversation skills for the "real world." They worry a lot about not being able to hold a conversation with a "normal person" when they leave prison. Their isolation means that they may not be able to go to a job interview and understand the questions the interviewer asks them.

Job Hunting

- ✦ *Getting the Job You Really Want:* covers job search methods, interviewing, resumes, and answering problem interview questions. This book also has companion DVDs but they are really dull!

Job Hunting Again

- ✦ *The Ex-Offender's Job Hunting Guide:* has really good sections on getting the right attitude for job hunting. Has a section on job hunting myths such as lying about your background and using resources.
- ✦ *Best Resumes & Letters for Ex-Offenders:* Good for teaching the functional resume format and common problems ex-offenders have with writing resumes.

Money and Budgeting Resources

- ✦ *41 Activities in Basic Money Management:* worksheets on paychecks, bank accounts, and credit cards.
- ✦ Scholastic.com: worksheets on "real world" math including paying rent, calculating mpg, shopping, and calculating a paycheck.
- ✦ *Things to Know about Spending and Saving Money:* This book is best for low level students. It uses stories to illustrate money issues. It covers budgeting, credit, saving, etc.

Character and Inspiration

- ✦ *Down But Not Out* DVD. This DVD is the autobiography of a professional boxer, Alphonso Bailey, who spent time in prison. He talks about how quickly things can change for the worse and how hard it is to build it back again.
- ✦ *Living Free* DVD. Highlights interviews with ex-offenders about their experiences getting released and starting over.

Role Model

- ✦ *Cooked* by Jeff Henderson. Henderson had a show on Food Network in which he helped ex-offenders train to be chefs. His autobiography is about his life as a drug dealer, his years in prison, and how he became a successful executive chef.

Review

- ✦ Students needs vary but often they need job hunting advice, functional resume writing, money management, social skills (particularly anger management and conversation skills)
- ✦ Student experiences vary but none of them have had stable jobs or career plans

No Set Plan

- ✦ This class varies from student to student and group to group
- ✦ They decide what we will cover and this gives them ownership in the class which increases participation
- ✦ It also means that I don't spend time covering stuff they already know

Obstacles

- ✦ One big obstacle in secure care is that we can't use the Internet with our students. This means that we can't teach them how to use job hunting websites, how to upload their resumes, and how to write professional e-mails.
- ✦ Lack of technological resources. We don't have enough computers to teach keyboarding, Excel, PowerPoint, or other office software programs

Student Obstacles

- ✦ Lack of skills is the least of our problems. We can teach them how to write a resume or look for a job or a write a budget but it's much harder to teach them how to handle difficult people in the office, how to accept a boss's authority, how to control their tempers, or convince them that life is hard work and that one has to work hard to succeed.

Last Bits

- Most of the books and DVDs I discussed in this presentation are available through Jist Publications, www.jist.com.
- You can e-mail me at shunt@azcorrections.gov
